

Sonnets of the Head and Heart



Joseph Warren Beach

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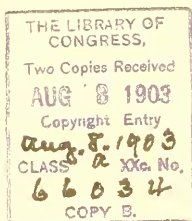


Boston: Richard G. Badger

The Gorham Press

1903

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PS 350 3
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Printed at
The Gorham Press
Boston

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Swallow flights

Praise of the Body

As one for whom the dazzling noonday beams
Are tempered in the cloister's dim retreat,
Surveys in gules and azure at his feet
The sun's white heraldry, that richly streams
Through storied glass: so in my soul that seems
A sense-embowered cell, the rays that beat
Fervent without, are robbed of all their heat,
And I am bathed in gules and azure dreams.

Ah, much-abused body that of old
Men deemed a glass opaque that baffled still
The efforts of the spirit after light,
I love thee for thy rich and manifold
Division of that light — so dost thou fill
The soul with entertainment infinite.

The Pursuit of Pleasure

Nay, thou whose body's every tingling sense
Is like a window to let in delight,
Whom all the world doth winsomely invite
To wanton with felicities intense, —
Well mayst thou don thine armour of defense
To frown upon the buxom world, and fight;
Well mayest thou, in grinning hell's despite,
With all those sweet amenities dispense.

But we that follow pleasure as she flies,
Begging a paltry alms for our content,
And never have beheld her gracious eyes,
Have yet no pleasant trespass to repent,
And we shall follow till our last hope dies
And our last volt of energy is spent.

Bacchantes

Come, let us kindle ecstasy with wine
 Of license, and divesting us of shame,
 Crown us with ivy in the wine god's name,
And purple clusters of his wanton vine.
And then let eyes with eager fury shine,
 And fury flushed and gleaming limbs inflame,
 And all, forgetful of immortal fame,
Dance, in a reeling, torch-illumined line.

We dance, and the ear-splitting cymbals crash,
 We dance, and rend the heavens with our cries
 Wild as the cries of desert beasts by night.
So for a while the frantic bodies flash,
 Till one by one, each panting carcase lies
 Obscure and quiet in the dubious light.

Nightmare

At dawn, the dim obscurity of sleep
Was troubled with returning tides of thought,
Disordered and tumultous, and fraught
With monsters of the intellectual deep.
I dreamed that Space, bewildered, could not keep
Her wonted order more, but was distraught,
And trusty Time, with sad confusion wrought,
Whole centuries of years would overleap.

And mid the wreck of all my wonted world.
Wherein she found no hope of lasting rest,
My spirit mourned for every baffled sense,
With vain illusions evermore oppressed,
Exposed to ignominious accidents
And from confusion to confusion whirled.

Ephemerae

The room was chill and dark, until a door
Swung open of a sudden, and behold!
A glorious shaft of light dispersed the cold.
Now through the breach the glittering legions pour,
And lo! where all was emptiness before,
The dancing motes in myriads untold —
Till of a sudden, with the shaft of gold,
They vanish, and are gone for evermore.

Dust-motes are we that dance into the day
Of gladness in the sun's propitious smile,
Creatures of his, with whom he does beguile
The tedious hours of idle time's delay.
A moment in the sunlight we shall play,
And we shall vanish in a little while.

The Cloud

Thou fleeting speck of white that farest still
Wind-driven through the sky, nor wilt abide,
Leading along the sunny mountain-side
Thy mote of shadow like a ghost of ill,
Thy phantom flight impalpable doth fill
My heart with longing evermore denied.
The old enigmas evermore divide
My powers of thought, and paralyze the will.

Thou holdest in thy bosom, with the rain —
But with the rain thou wilt not give it birth —
The secret of all being : for with mirth
Either thou farest blithe for some demesne
Where dream-felicities forever last,
Or, helpless, thou art driven with the blast.

Revelation

I dreamed my sore-distracted eyes in vain
 Sought whither in the darkness they should turn
 Some secret of the labyrinth to learn
That might relieve the trouble of my brain.
And suddenly methought the wide domain
 Of dubious chaos inwardly did burn,
 As if some prisoned god did strongly yearn
To make the meaning of the riddle plain.

Long spears of light shot out on every hand,
 And all the substance of the world did fall
 In simple, rangéd lines symmetrical,
 Out of the chaos of unmeaning war
Breeding a form my soul could understand,
 And on the dark disorder dawned a star.

Animism

The wind is up, and every silent thing
Has found a soul of motion and delight.
The crisp leaves soar as if some merry sprite
Were lifting them aloft on wanton wing.
And to my fanciful imagining
They sing mysterious carols in their flight. —
Yet is it e'er beyond mine utmost might
To catch a single note of all they sing.

Because thy song is inarticulate,
Full-sounding Nature, to my human ear,
Untrained to catch the subtler range of sound,
I will not unbelieving hesitate,
But deem the song thou singest without peer
For sense and sage significance profound.

A Nocturne

Faint murmurs die upon the dreamy hush,
And strange lights vaguely glimmer, for the moon
Veils in a pensive mist, this midmost June,
Her brightness as a virgin veils her blush.
Across the leaves mysteriously brush
The wind's light skirts, and still in languid swoon
The willows and the ghostly poplars croon,
While faint and far the river waters rush.

The night is like a silver goblet full —
Full to the brim, with fragrant liquor flush —
Ready, should some enchanter's fingers crush
The final drop — one charmed syllable —
Sufficient to allay immortal woe,
In floods of mystic wine to overflow.

Proteus

Knowest thou yet my voice? Or hast thou heard
In vain the murmurs of thy paradise?
When to the horn's melodious enterprise
The low voice of the violin demurred,
Was it not still the glad cry of the bird?
And when you felt your love's bewitching eyes
Upon you, did you entertain surprise
That in your own heart the same longing stirred?

I am a god protean, for my name
Is named diversely. I am called the Word
Because I made the world. As Love I fill
The veins of all the universe with flame.
And because my desire, though long deferred,
Is ever won at last, men call me Will.

Protestants

Steady as sands within the hour-glass fall,
Somewhither sets all Nature like a tide.
Into the west the hounding breezes ride
By squadrons, and each quiet interval
Is filled with clamor of the waterfall.
Only upon this gusty river-side
You will not budge, old pine, but in your pride
Heed not your mistress' low, imperious call.

Only yourself, and I, that set my will
Against the will of Nature manifest,
Opposing to her stern commandment still
The yearning of my human interest.
So shall we some few bitter drops distil
And triumph, but we shall not win to rest.

The Swimmer

I cannot see beyond the mounting wave.

There is no mercy in the leaden sky.

I strangle with salt water, and my cry
Beats on the billow's merciless concave
Unheeded. Fathom-deep above my grave

The bitter, overwhelming waters lie.

Ah Christ! if still thine offered help be nigh,
Enfold me with thine arms of love, and save!

Thine arms have closed about me, and I sink
Abandoned and voluptuous away,

Like one that cheats the overburdened day
With dreams engendered of Lethean drink —
Amid the green, malicious sea's alarms
Pillowed, and sure in my strong swimmer's arms.

The Pursuit of the Ideal

I

So long have I been faithful — but thy face
Ever eludes me, gleaming on some height
Uncertain, like a glint of stars at night
Illusive in the shimmering azure space.

Intangible, unguessed is all thy grace,
A spirit-grace, that still evades the sight
Of sensuous eye, and will not bear the light
Of mortal gaze, nor yield to man's embrace.

Oh, whither dost thou lure me on a way
So cheerless and austere? Were but some goal
At last assured where thou shouldst crown my
ills

With sweet reward of amorous delay,
And yield thee to the yearning of my soul
In some fair glade among the purple hills !

II

But nay, thy beauty is not measured so
 As is the rose's for her velvet red,
 Or lily's for the proud poise of her head.
Upon thy cheek there is no mortal glow,
Nor maiden charm that mortal sense may know
 Upon thine unsubstantial form is shed —
 No breast's half-fancied fulness, men are led
To follow blindly as the waters flow.

My spirit flies to thee and straight is filled,
 But my fierce blood with unfulfilled desire
 Burns ever unassuaged! Thou canst not think,
In thy sweet bosom where all strife is stilled,
 How my pale lips, parched with the inward fire,
 Cry out from dawn to dark for saving drink.

III

So long have I been faithful, mistress mine,
And still I follow thee, with straining eyes,
Lest thy so tenuous form should fade, in skies
Of melting light lost like a pearl in wine,
Or else engulfed in gloom, and then no sign
Were left me. For thy light alone belies
The bitter sentence of the wind that sighs
Disconsolate down the drear slope to the brine.

And so I toil along the ragged hills,
Footsore and weak under the empty sky,
And never wait to count the weary cost.
I known thy sovran beauty, how it fills
The hungry soul. I know that I should die —
The better part of me — if thou wert lost

The World of a Pessimist

I

I dreamed that after many days I came
 Upon the object of my last desire,
 Through very fury of malicious flame
 Winning at last unto my haven entire.
 And there, resplendent in my lady's bower,
 I knelt in mail, and felt my lady's face
 Smile over me, and felt her hand's sweet dower
 Laid on my bent head with an angel's grace.
 And why, alas! when I was free to rise
 And clasp my lady to my swelling breast,
 Came there a mist of loathing on mine eyes,
 And o'er my limbs an instant need of rest?
 Down at her feet my fainting spirit slips —
 I cannot lift the full cup to my lips!

II

To me that look upon your pageantry,
 Refulgent lady Life, with shrinking sense,
It wears no vague, seductive mystery,
 Now I have pierced your armour of pretence.
That ivory-gleaming, siren woman's flesh
 The rich embroidered satins well array —
I have no strength of manhood to enmesh
 With lust of such illusory display.
For when I raised mine eyes upon your face
 Of chiseled beauty, and upon your eyes,
My arms refused that long desired embrace,
 The fruit of toil and tireless enterprise.
Mine eyes, caught fast in your eyes' fatal snare,
Turned shuddering from the secret lurking there.

III

For thee the whole creation has gone mad
 With ecstasy of action, and the sleep
That made the world's blind heart serenely glad
 No longer bathes it in oblivion deep ;
But wild dreams interrupt that sweet repose,
 Teasing and torturing the troubled brain.
Day after day the raging fever grows,
 And further spreads its nets of fervent pain.
Alas, that ever seeds of discontent
 Should have brought forth this weed of enterprise,
That rankly overtops the wall ! So meant
 That witch that did the fatal charm devise, —
Scheming a crop of bitterness to reap
From the unviolated gardens of old sleep.

IV

First the bare atoms, in the silent sea

Where they were sleeping dreamless, felt a breeze
Of trouble stirring. Then reluctantly

Did they abandon their estate of ease,

Infected with the fever of desire,

To whirl through endless orbits of distress,

And kindle one another into fire

With furious and feverish caress.

Thence were the fiery constellations born, —

Whole broods of worlds brought forth at one embrace,

Planets, and comets wandering forlorn,

And all the suns that fill heaven's echoing space,

Like anvils smitten with old Vulcan's might,

With vain reverberations of keen light.

V

Then when the earth, ejected from the sun
 With violent explosion, had once learned
 A regular recurrent course to run,
 She dozed a moment as she turned and turned.
 But swift the fever of life flared up again.
 The ooze of ocean felt a trouble grow
 Within its bowels, where the vital pain
 Through protoplasmic cells began to flow.
 Then were the green, pellucid depths thick hung
 With marvellous vegetation, and the earth
 Carpeted deep with mingling greens that flung
 A veil of plenty o'er the primal dearth.
 So swift the poison sped, and spread the curse
 Of amorous life through all the universe.

VI

Still in the dim soul of the silent green
 Lurked a suggestion of yet fuller life, —
A groping instinct for a sense more keen
 And varied armour for extended strife. —
For some must perish where so many strove
 With frantic madness for their own distress.
And so grew sentience, and the sentient throve,
 And ripened slowly into consciousness.
And many organs painfully were wrought,
 Fulfilling many functions in the beast.
So through long ages mercilessly fought
 The votaries of life, and still increased
The flame of insuppressible desire,
As life went on from higher form to higher.

VII

But never grew content, nor would the race
Sink back, with its achievements satisfied,
Into oblivion's long desired embrace.
Ever a voice within the creature cried
For labours herculean to engage
The growing spirit — every added sense
Brought in its train new weary wars to wage.
And last the brain of man, with his immense
Grasp on the past and future and the far,
Subduing space and nimble time, gave birth
To that intestine, universal war
That rages unassuaged through all the earth,
Engaging all the strength of humankind, —
A war of spirit forces in the mind.

VIII

Ah, what a piece of work, the poet sings,
Is this fine product of the ages, — man !
And down the corridors of time there rings
An empty echo since the race began —
Ah, what a piece of work ! — The passing breeze
Makes in the firs its immemorial moan.
Methinks I hear the toiling centuries,
Bent o'er their endless task together groan,
Fashioning that renowned infinitude
Of human faculties, — devoted slaves,
Their foreheads all with bloody sweat imbrued :
And as I watch them ebbing like vain waves
That vainly flowed, I cannot find a voice
With those triumphant echoes to rejoice.

IX

“ The life so short, the craft so long to learn ” —

Whether of love or of whatever art

Poet or sage the hopelessness discern,

That strikes despair in to the yearning heart,

Would all the cycles of the years suffice

To win full satisfaction? Lo, they spread

Eternally unrolling, to entice

Yet farther those fond pilgrims they have led

After the fleet horizon for so long.

The fleet horizon will not be outrun

By any panting suitor. She is strong

With victories innumerable won,

And counts it most unmaidenly disgrace

To yield her ever unto man's embrace.

X

In form and moving fashioned so express
 That very breathing is felicity,
 And fate seems ever stooping to caress, —
 So in the laureled sage of Germany,
 Prophet and lover perfectly combined,
 More than in any other of our day
 Life springs up like a fountain unconfined,
 Whereon the frolic sunlight loves to play.
 Fittest indeed that labours with delight,
 Rejoicing in the triumphs of the past,
 And still exulting in sufficient might
 To subjugate the future, with its vast
 Display of gleaming bastions to be stormed,
 With soul-delighting functions well performed.

XI

In form and moving fashioned so express,
Great athlete, sinewed for Olympian games,
That ran to greet life's varied business
Exulting, I must think of other names, —
Byron and Schopenhauer — men of might
That, for some petty maggot in the brain,
Found only anguish where you found delight,
And for blithe exercise, a bed of pain.
Yet were they of immortal lineage,
The children of Olympus manifest,
And we that claim a dubious heritage
Of happy godhead, cannot hope, at best,
For aught but shameful slavery and toil,
The hapless villeins of a barren soil.

XII

Ah, Lady without Mercy, ere I faint,
A respite grant — alas, my foolish prayer !
To dream that she might harken to my plaint,
So long inexorably cold and fair !
For ever as the momentary dream
Displays her in resplendent beauty wreathed,
A maddening mirage, whose features gleam
Bright as a flashing scimitar unsheathed,
Alluring as the fragrance of old wine,
And palpable as self ; and as I move,
Ecstatic and assured to make her mine,
And reap full satisfaction of my love —
Sudden a baffling veil doth round her fall,
And I am left alone — without the wall !

XIII

Alone, and quite confounded in the night,
Chilled with the breath of some bleak, homeless wind,
I lie unmanned, nor ask for any might,
Unto my frozen harbourage resigned.
My utmost longing, in this desperate case,
Is but to lie untroubled with desire,
My weary head low-pillowed in that place,
Where frost and sleep with Lethe might conspire.
But ere the waves of sweet oblivion
Can drown me deep in peace, that siren voice,
Calling me from my business half done,
Inexorably overrules my choice,
And spurs my jaded flanks with specious lies
Up endless hills of fruitless enterprise.

XIV

Not from thine unrelenting loftiness,
That never will vouchsafe me any grace,
Do I derive my most extreme distress :
For I have long foregone that sweet embrace
Of thine elusive body, and would fain
Expel thine image from my hopeless heart.
But of thy cruelty do I complain,
That never wholly wilt from me depart,
And leave me to my much-required rest ;
But when of hopeless venturing I tire,
And fall exhausted upon Lethe's breast,
Thou dost new trouble in my soul inspire,
And lure me — fool ! — to follow once again
O'er hill and hollow my old path of pain.

XV

As some brave martyr that, upon the rack,
 In midmost torture will not once complain,
 Until the swoon comes, mercifully black,
 To wrap away all feeling ; yet again
 When he awakes to find a fiendish hate
 Has spared his life for torture more intense,
 He will cry out at last, and execrate
 The life that brings him back his suffering sense :
 So is it with our giant universe,
 Devoted to immortal agony.
 Methinks, with each renewal of the curse
 Of tingling life through all eternity,
 The whole creation uttereth a cry
 To be delivered of its pain and die.

XVI

O ye, all ye that ride into the fight,
 To battle for that sovran Lady Life,
Radiant in mail, and confident in might
 For triumph in the all-engaging strife,
When you shall lay down at your Lady's feet
 The precious trophies that your might has won, —
Honour, and riches, and what joys most sweet
 Your hearts desire beneath the smiling sun :
Pause not for me a moment in your ride,
 Your headlong ride into the hot melee,
Nor bend an ear to one that limps beside
 The universal road — lest I should say,
Myself most impotent, some killing word
That you were better dead than to have heard !

In The Forest of Arden

I

This busy water, so unconscious quite
 Of me who spy it out, among the ferns
 Low hidden, no least lesson deeper learns
 Of shrilling gust that churns it into white
 Or sun that glorifies it into gold
 Inlaid with glowing purple. For all day
 These shallow waves among the reeds display
 A changing Moorish pattern, and are bold

 To shift without a warning arabesques
 So delicate to Japanese grotesques
 Of oily watersnakes, a shadowy brown
 Upon the palest blue : as, in some dream,
 A dim face merges into one agleam,
 And then the whole in shadow dwindles down.

II

So easily impressed with beauties! Yes,
And swift to leave one beauty ere its husk
Be scarcely penetrated. Now at dusk
Seems yon smooth stretch more stable? Can you guess
This imaged cedar, perfect in detail
Even to the crested blue-bird on the spray,
Before the coming of the night will fail,
And leave a single bright star where it lay?

So unremembering the restless deep,
So unenduring all its lovely dreams!
This dry, dead beetle scarcely more asleep —
This most minute green insect, which, it seems,
Can have no name, that vainly seems to strive,
How more than all the billowy lake alive!

III

All yesterday the water sped serenely,
A million sparkles o'er a floor of blue,
Toward yonder mountain's foot, as though in view
There were some goal to northward; now in queenly
Inconstancy, she takes up a new burden,
White-crested wave treading upon the heels
Of panting white-capped wave, until one feels
The southward goal is worthy better guerdon.

All seeming, all unmeaning, all in vain —
Not so my soul, O God, not so my soul!
I'll not allow it such a passive scroll
For fate to print his fickle will on: stain,
And then wash white again; or glorify
Only to tone it back to neutral dye!

IV

A year ago I could have well believed
My soul such passive matter, pliant still
To any shaping hand, the idle will
Of god or liliated goddess, who relieved
This way the bare monotony of bliss —
Matter inconstant as the aimless sands
Of shifting rivers, constant but in this,
Tomorrow cannot trace today's warm hands.

For this hour's song was an inscription graved
Where last hour's appetite had faded out.
Each doubt gave way to the ensuing doubt :
Each temporary chief his title waived
At last. I reasoned from analogy :
Waters remember not, nor soul of me.

V

But God has since been very good to me,
 That I such doctrine can no longer hold.
 I have been shown a sacred mystery,
 And as with strong wine it has made me bold, —
 Bold to defend, whate'er may fade away,
 The permanence of love. For has not God,
 Belovéd, struck the spark in me, his clod,
 Flashed you for light upon the higher way?

For I have seen a beauty it were vain
 Waste feeble words in limning; and though firm
 In trust God still will succor with his rain,
 Never shall faith in any further term
 Of bliss divert me from my one fair dole, —
 The beauty of a naked human soul.

VI

Ah, do you wince, dear heart, and does it pain
 That I this tawdry tribute bring of verse
 To hang about your shrine, taking in vain
 That heart-embowered name of you, and worse,
 Setting its sterling seal upon my plate?
 I think that you are jealous of my rime,
 Fearing this comely handmaid may, in time,
 Supplant the mistress Love she served of late.

You must be wrong, my dear, to feel this dread
 That so discredits Love, and Song, and me.
 But say the word, and I will let it be,
 This riming, though it were my daily bread.
 For though the bard be prone to praise, 'twere
 wrong,
 When Love commands desist, to raise the song.

VII

My heart exulted to believe you cared,
Yet pained me too, love, when you once betrayed
This strange mistrust of Love's meek serving-maid,
And thus touched me, nor even Love's self spared.
For I had loved Song as the interpreter
Of Love's dumb language merely, nor had dreamt
Any could woo Song from great Love exempt,
The empty words, the soft, narcotic purr.
And still I hold Song cannot stand alone :
Song is the blushing flesh-wreath, Love the bone.
Let him who would forget his Love beware :
Clasp he mere Song, he clasps but empty air.
Love chose not Song, but Song chose Love instead.
"Whither thou goest, I will go," she said.

VIII

Then do not think love, like that feeble pain
Of anger, can burn all its soul away
Through vent of words, nor that, from day to day,
I thus shall ease my ache. Is it not plain
All joys in heaven and earth I count no gain
Beside this sole transcendent good of love,
And since on my anointed head this dove
Descended, I can nothing more attain?

And so, its vestal, 'tis my single care
Never to let this sacred flame burn out.
Therefore I shelter it from gusts without
Beneath the concave palm of song: e'en there
Deeming it safest from the sad world-soil,
Fed by pure, artless song's unfailing oil.

IX

For if your face should slip away, dear soul
 That my soul kneels to, face that was unveiled
 For those brief seconds — if those features failed,
 And into dread oblivion's darkness stole,
 What then were left upon this desolate sphere
 To urge me from the welcome drink of death —
 What shadowy solace, or what feeble breath
 Of heaven reward my empty sojourn here?

Not Song could friend me : when I should arise,
 In mockery of all earth holds to prize,
 Dead Love, with dry tears, shuddering, from your
 clay,
 To woo the slender form that mourneth near,
 She, incorruptible, would blanch with fear,
 Cover her eyes, and silent slink away.

X

Earth without you were but an empty shell,
 You animating Love. The myriad sheen,
 The shifting glory of its gold and green,
 And all its modesties, and all the spell
 Of moonlight, and the thrill of early morn
 Have you for inspiration and for life,
 And all the ecstasy of birds is rife
 With love to be, and love already born.

Love is beneath it all, and if love fail,
 There is no beauty in the rose's blush,
 No sweet suggestion in the mellow hush
 Of moonrise, and this fascinating veil
 Holds us no longer, for no spirit-wind
 Makes wave its silken meshes from behind.

XI

"But since you came to love so late, what then? —
 Did earth provide no beauty for your soul, —
 To drive away the wolf, no slightest dole
 Of spirit-provender?" The world of men,
 Ere I discovered Love, and God's dear world
 Of blue and green seemed an Arcadian vale,
 Where, breathless, I must find, ere sunlight fail,
 The nymph of Love in wood and water furled.

 And now that I have found Her, life's a school
 Where, She beside me, I may roam, and learn
 What mysteries may lurk beneath a fern,
 What forms of love lie mirrored in a pool, —
 Labor of love to pass no leaf unturned,
 Lest some least violet lesson be not learned.

XII

One woke upon an island in the sea,
A barren sand-rift ; and he was alone.
But he was fresh from sleeping, and there shone
Afar the promise of a day to be.
For o'er the ocean's rim there rose the sun
Of all his hopes, a solitary mast.
Ruddy with youth he waited till at last
The ardent race unto his isle was run.

He signals ; but they pay no heed. He cries
Frantic with fear ; but on the vessel flies,
Swiftly its way into the west to carve —
Till, 'mid the splendors of the passing day,
Haggard, he sees the black mast sink away,
And, white-haired, he is left alone to starve.

XIII

You think my love is some abstraction, bred
Of idle musing in a lovely place,
As far away from earth as the calm, bright face
Of yonder drowsy moon, and quite as dead
As moonlight misty on the lilies' bed.

You think it but a drunken ecstasy
Of garden-haunting humming-bird or bee,
A disembodied love, on lilies fed.

O common source from which all mortals drink,
Pure fountain-head that waters all the green,
I would not scorn you, but that I have been
Bolder than most, and where the many think
The journey ends, I still have pierced the woods,
And found my spring among the solitudes.

XIV

Warm breath upon my cheek ; this well-loved arm
About my neck, and clasping me so close !

All timid-bold — for so the good queen chose,
Who might have scorned, to shut me in from harm.
This dear face, spirit-bright, that I, o'er-bold,

At arm's length in the dim light do peruse ;

Two lips atremble, that I may not use
To quench my lips' thirst in — my heart cries, hold !

Two lips so round and red, that show you full
Of this good earthly warmth — your panting breast,

My breast now leans on, does the same attest —

O soul my love has found so beautiful,

My face hid in your bosom, I must grow

Into a silence : for I love you so !

XV

Because I am a spirit, then, I love
That spirit-You with love that, like perfume
Of swinging censer, through the stellar gloom
Unhindered, rises to the courts above.
Before you, day and night, I feed a flame
Of such love with the purest oil of God,
Offering worthy my love's gracious nod
Of recognition, — love without a shame.

And then, because I am a man — alas !
I know not whether I should joy or greet —
I love you for your body's painful sweet
With all that brutal passion. — In the grass
I hide my face — forgive me if you can,
I love you with the mad love of a man.

XVI

And have I spun this beauty out of me, —
 From my soul's substance quarried marble pure
 To chisel such a Venus forth? "Be sure,
 From that rich store-house where the lock and key
 Secure your heaped ideals, you project
 That pictured fancy, prisoned in a beam,
 Upon this girl; the light cut off, she'd seem
 A very common mortal, I suspect."

"A very common mortal" — blasphemy!
 Not for her dower of beauty, let it be
 Greater or less, but that my eyes have seen
 Into her inmost soul God's lightnings shine,
 I love her. For whate'er she may have been,
 Then she was made, not beautiful, but mine!

XVII

Are you not mine? Why then the blessed flash
That showed us to each other, nude of soul,
Nor did that nakedness at all abash,
But by a bond of knowledge set the whole
World at a distance? — or do I grow fond,
And there was no such thing; but you, clear-eyed,
Pity this visionary, heartless to deride
My dream of such imaginary bond?

I cannot think it. Therefore let us kneel,
Hand clasped in hand, before the unknown God,
Who, while He has scarce menaced with His rod,
Does thus His attribute of love reveal, —
Grateful to tears, whatever rules above,
For this inestimable gift of love.

XVIII

This morning through the valley rides the breeze
 With face set constant to the north, and drives
 The waves before him northward like the lives
Of subject millions. Subject unto these,
The pliant water-grasses point the same,
 Obedient to the current. Each poor mouth
Echoes the king's "North, north!" till he proclaim
 A new course, when the shout will be, "South,
 south!"

Shall my soul be a bunch of ribbon-grass,
 Servile and fawning, shouting now for you
And then tomorrow for another? — pass,
 Dark vision! — Let me be but constant, true :
Bending once only, on the water lie
Pointing forever north, though I should die !

XIX

I sometimes wonder — and I hold my breath —

 Could God, who, through the fortunes of this life,
I hold, is ever fitting us for death,

 Mean — cruel plunge of necessary knife —

Those few sweet, sad days when we trod on air

 As some vague betterment for each at length —

Your purity should purge my foul spots fair,

 My passion sear your tenderness to strength.

Then when God looked upon His work and found

 It well done, did He tear us twain apart,

With wisdom for us purblind too profound,

 Judging, our bliss enjoyed, an aching heart

Were best balm for the sorely ailing soul —

 Joy done with, then with grief complete the whole?

XX

My dear, we cannot by absurd deceit
Evade God's law, nor by our puny strength
Frustrate; nor can we doubt that thus, at length,
We should but our own groping, blind selves cheat
Of our allotted bliss. But we can hope,
Hope till we wrench our poor hearts with the pain,
That God will make this simple purpose plain,
•We two shall toil together up the slope.

O little, timid body, with the heart
So very big and brave, I cannot part
With one I love so tenderly and well.
It were to sacrifice my very life,
My bulwark set against this sad world's hell,
My inspiration, and — God grant — my wife !

Disillusion

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Disillusion

I

Alas, brave words, that hide the lurking fear
 And kindle momentary warmth, will soon
 Blush into silence, as the sophist moon
 That breeds them pales, and in the ghostly leer
 Of gray dawn all the dread truth shall appear!
 Ah, braggart words betray the worse poltroon —
 Ere long the boast upon the lips of June
 Turns wailing as the halcyon breezes veer.

I have been very loud in protestation :
 When doubts pressed hardest, highest was my vaunt.
 Buoyed on a wave of frantic exultation,
 I have hurled skulking doubt his taunt for taunt.
 But now I am o'erwhelmed with shade on shade
 Of stalking fears that my weak soul invade.

II

I fear that I shall lose the sense of you,
 The glowing sense of you that made life worth.
 My ears grow dull unto your voice's mirth.
Mine eyes grow dim, nor catch the wonted hue
And flush of your sweet body as it drew
 Tints from the fairest flowers of the earth.
 No longer at the touch of you is birth
Of bliss ineffable and ever new.

At last my heart — selfish, forgetting heart! —
 No longer sensible to every breath
 That once had wrung its taut strings into song,
Feebly responds to yours his answering part,
 As to some reminiscent air of death
 Might stir some loose-stringed harp that slum-
 bered long.

III

Hour after hour, in the teeming night
 Within the deep wood where I wander, blows
 Face after face into a perfect rose,
Limned on the darkness with a spirit-light,
And every petal glimmers shadow-bright.
 They are the faces of the souls of those
 I would imprint in memory, and close
In my heart's jealous prison against flight.

But ah, there is not one that will remain
 For a familiar comfort in the way,
 Or witness for my heart at his own bar.
Old features subtly fade, dissolve away,
 While new ones brighten ever. What the gain
 Since I can fix no constant, polar star?

IV

Is there no depth then in these souls of ours
Where love may strike deep roots that shall remain,
Or is their soil too shallow to sustain
More lusty growths, that it should tax our powers
So hard to nurse a night these pale moon-flowers, —
Helpless, when moonless morning comes again,
To stay their petty ardour from its wane
Though we should weep a sea of pensive showers?

Vain souls, we wring our heart's last, warmest red
To water these wan flowers, and fondly deem
Their roots strike down into eternity —
Till suddenly, the soft night being sped,
We wake to find all but a feeble dream,
Our vision vanished irrecoverably.

V

Ah, seal my rash mouth up with kisses, dear,
 Lest I should blurt out irrevocably
 Some desperate sentence. Let us rather be
 Both dumb and blind, than that a doubt should peer
 Into our poor hearts with malignant leer,
 Or whisper steal in between you and me!
 Let us ignore a jealous fate's decree —
 With folding arms fence out the invading fear.

Can we not thus, in clinging, wild embrace,
 Shut out the world and the world's withering doubt?
 Can we not, doting on each other's face,
 And tingling with each other's touch, shut out
 Our very souls, and kindle in some vein
 Love-warmth, and for an instant love again?

VI

Nay, sovran Love, let me not look askance

Where those flowers bloom. My foot must never
stay

In thy steep path, nor eyes uncertain stray

‘ To glean that siren sweetness with a glance.

Dreading to lose thy dim-lit countenance,

I dare not thy faint summons disobey :

Lest somehow, suddenly in broad midday,

I should be stricken with some blinding trance,

And waking, should behold a country strange,

With alien features all forlorn, and hills

Where restless, driven shadows sadly range,

Bondslaves of shameful thirst that nothing stills,

And haply I should meet on the vain heath

My lost soul, in the desolate land of death.

VII

Learn we through trailing of the broken wing
Our simple lesson of humility.

Rashly aspiring to the larks, would we
With those empyreal singers soar and sing.
So on heroic quest far venturing,
A sudden weakness came on you and me,
And from the clear seventh heaven instantly
We fell to this our lowly travailing.

Never again shall we so pierce the blue
With flashing pinions at the sun's red heart.
But time at last performs his healing part :
And mid the branches of earth-rooted yew
Our invalid ambition shall grow strong,
And we shall venture forth again with song.

VIII

Many a soft illusion has the moon
 Wrought for us, dear, all of a summer night,
 Who yielded willing to his gentle might
Of flattering hypnotism — all too soon
Scattered beneath the searching glare of noon !
 The passionate roses, in his fostering light,
 Shot suddenly to fair and wondrous height.
How should we not regret so rich a boon?

Yet am I for the sun, that gilds at morn
 The heaven-aspiring fir-tops on a hill !
I count it scarce a loss when his brave horn
 Dispels that dear dream-fancy. There is still,
When kissing lips turn languid, summer nights,
The sunlit path together on the heights.



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